

Remarks in Houston*September 27, 1996*

The President. Thank you. Thank you so much. Hello, Houston. I'm glad to be here. Thank you for being here. I want to thank all those who have spoken before and all those who are here with us. I thank Congressman Gene Green and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee—how well they have represented you. I am proud to work with them. I want to thank Nick Lampson, who's running for Congress in the 9th District, and I hope you'll help him get elected.

Thank you, Senator Rodney Ellis, Mario Gallegos. Thank you, State Representative Al Edwards. Thank you, Texas Democratic Chairman Bill White, my long-time friend, for your service in the Energy Department in our administration and now for leading our party here. Thank you, Garry Mauro. Thank you, Victoria Baldwin. And thank you, Mayor Bob Lanier and Elyse Lanier for your great leadership.

[At this point, there was a disturbance in the audience.]

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Hey, folks, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I'm glad—wait a minute, wait, wait. I'm glad we've got some people from the other camp here. They need to hear this.

And you know, when all you do—wait a minute. And you know, it's hard to hear when all you're doing is name calling. And so, I want you to do what I said at the Democratic Convention. I want us to be respectful and polite and positive and issue-oriented, because there are some things I want everybody in Texas to hear today. And I want you to help me say it.

You know, I came right here to this park almost 4 years ago, right at the end of the election. And I said that I wanted to give this country back and its future back to ordinary Americans. I said that I wanted us to go into the 21st century with opportunity alive for everybody, with every citizen being responsible, and this country coming together, not being driven apart by our differences. We should respect our differences, build on them, and understand it's our meal

ticket to the future. Just like the mayor said, if we can learn to live and work together, there is no stopping America and our best days are still ahead.

Now, 4 years ago I had a tough time in Texas. I mean the Democrats hadn't been winning the White House in a long time, and then I looked up and both my opponents were from Texas. *[Laughter]* It hardly seemed fair. And here you were, the biggest State in—the second biggest State in the country, representing so much of the future, and I know I'd spent more time in Texas than anybody else running over the last 40 years. And I had to run against two people from Texas. *[Laughter]* Well, that's not a handicap anymore, and I don't have any excuse. But neither do you.

So why don't we just think about where we've come from and where we're going? Four years ago, this country had high unemployment, 20 years of stagnant wages, increasing inequality among working people. The crime rate was going up. The welfare rolls were going up. Public cynicism was going up because we despaired that we could make any difference, that what our leaders in Washington did would make any difference to people here at home, wherever home was in America.

Well, 4 years can make a lot of difference. And I appreciate what Congressman Green and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee said. I especially appreciate what the mayor said about the work we've done together. But let me tell you what happened to me when I was in Longview this morning. We had 13,000 people in Longview this morning. It was great, unbelievable. And I ran into three people, just walking down the line like I always do. After I talked, I went down the line and shook hands with people. And I ran into three people; they weren't holding my signs or the other party's signs. They weren't holding—they were just people there. But I want to tell you who they were.

I met a man who was a Vietnam veteran, with his wife and his child. And his child has spina bifida, has had 12 operations. That man and his child at long last, because of a bill I signed yesterday, are finally going to get the medical attention and the disability support they need.

And then I went down the line a little ways, and I met a lady who said, "I'm a 34-year-old single mother of two children, and I'm a graduate of AmeriCorps. I work for my community, and now I'm paying my way through the college here to start a better life and give my kids a better life."

And then I went on down a little more and I met a lady who was really crying. She was so—I didn't know what was the matter, she was obviously disturbed. And she said, "I'm sorry that I'm emotional, but because of the family and medical leave law, I was able to take a little time off from work when my husband was so sick with cancer, and I didn't lose my job. And it made a big difference to our life and our family."

I say this to point out that too many times over the last several years our politics in Washington have been more about hot air than concrete action to change the lives of the American people for the better. And I was determined when I went to Washington to replace the politics of finger-pointing and asking who's to blame with the politics of saying, what can we do to make this country a better place? What can we do to work together? What can we do to build a better future for our children? And I come here to tell you today we're in better shape than we were 4 years ago and we're on the right track for the 21st century.

You know, I couldn't help but thinking about a lot of things that have been said over the last 4 years. I remember that Mr. Morales' opponent once said that if the President's economic plan passes in 1993, the deficit will go up and unemployment will go up and it will throw us into a recession. It's a terrible, terrible idea. And a lot of people believed him, and it took a while before we could tell, you know. But now we know. Now we know.

So here's the report on what they all voted against: 4 years later, 10½ million new jobs, a record number of new small businesses, record exports of America's goods and services, the highest rate of homeownership in 15 years, 4½ million new homeowners, every small business in the country eligible for a tax cut when they invest more in their business if they buy their own health insurance, easier for them to take our retirement plans.

And yesterday, the census report, which comes out every year at this time, a totally nonpolitical document, tells us how we're doing. Here's what the census report of the United States said yesterday: It said that in 1995 median income—that is the families in the middle—increased on average almost \$900 after inflation over '94, the biggest increase for ordinary Americans in 10 years. It said that since that economic plan passed, the increase was over \$1,600 in the pockets of ordinary Americans. It said that we had the biggest decrease in child poverty in one year in 20 years in 1995. It said that we had the biggest decrease in inequality among working American families in 27 years. It said that we had the biggest reduction in the number of people living in poverty—most of them working, I might add—in 27 years. It said that we had the biggest drop recorded to the lowest levels ever—listen to this—since they have been keeping these statistics, that the poverty rate among African-Americans and American senior citizens had reached its lowest level in recorded history. We are on the right track, folks, to the 21st century. Don't let anybody kid you about that. We are moving in the right direction.

As Congressman Green said, on October 1st, 10 million Americans will get an increase in their minimum wage. And let me tell you what else that bill does. It gives a \$5,000 tax credit to anyone who will adopt a child. There's a lot of kids out there that need a good home, and this will help.

Thanks to the leadership of people like the mayor of Houston, the crime rate in the United States has dropped for 4 straight years in a row. And our crime bill is putting 100,000 police on the street and helping to support the decline in crime. And we ought to finish it.

Now, let me say one other thing. Mr. Lampson's opponent and a lot of other people made a lot of headway 4 years ago, going out to Texans and to people in my home State and around the country saying, "Well, that fool President's trying to take your gun away. That's what that Brady bill's all about. That's what that assault weapons ban's all about. He wants to take your gun away. He's going to interfere with your second amendment rights." And you know, no one knew

in 1994, and it was pretty scary. But now we know. And you know something, it turned out we told the truth. That bill protected 650 different kinds of hunting and sporting weapons. Not a single hunter in Texas, not a one, lost a rifle. But 60,000 felons, fugitives, and stalkers could not get handguns because of the Brady bill. We were right, and they were wrong. And now we know. We're on the right track to the 21st century.

The welfare rolls are down almost 2 million. Child support collections are up almost 50 percent, by \$3.8 billion. That's why people can get off welfare, if their children are supported by their parents. Our environment is cleaner, our water, our air, our food. We're making progress in public health and the environment. We cleaned up more toxic waste dumps in 3 years than our opponents did in 12. We are moving in the right direction. And I came here to ask you to help me build that bridge to the 21st century. Will you do it? Will you do it?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Now, folks, I want—

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

Now listen, we've got just 39 days left, 39 days for every one of you to find some time to talk to your friends and neighbors and family members, other folks who work with you and live with you in Texas, people you know beyond the State borders. And I want you to talk to them about the bridge to the 21st century we have to build. There are three or four big ideas in this election. Do you think we ought to build a bridge to the future or can we build a bridge to the past?

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. Do you believe that you're better off on your own, or do you think the First Lady's right, it does take a village to raise our children and to build a great city, to build a great State, to build a great nation, all of us working together? Do you believe our best days are behind us or our best days ahead of us?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. That is what you have to decide.

Folks, we have to—first of all, we've got to keep this economy growing. That means

we have to balance the budget because that keeps interest rates down. All the experts tell me not to talk about that. They said, "You go out and rally, you'll bore people to death if you talk about balancing the budget." But let me tell you something. Our opponents on the other side, they talk about how conservative they are. We have reduced the deficit 4 years in a row. You know when the last time that happened was? You know when it happened, in the 1840's, before the Civil War. Don't tell me about conservative. Don't tell me about that. We reduced the size of the Government, the number of Government regulations and killed more ineffective and outdated programs than they ever did. Don't tell me about being conservative.

But I'll tell you something. I think we ought to have enough Government left to help people get an education, to protect our environment, to take care of the elderly with Medicare, and to build this country and move it forward. And I think you do, too. I think you do, too. So, yes, balance the budget. But do it without wrecking Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment. And do it without wrecking our commitment to the future. We have to invest in research and technology.

Just before I came here, I went out to welcome Shannon Lucid back to Houston from space. And I was given a note before I welcomed her that said when she was a little girl, she told someone that she wanted to be a rocket scientist, and an adult said to her, there's no such thing, and if there were, it wouldn't be a woman.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Well, let me tell you something. My little girl and little girls all over America and not so little girls, they think Shannon Lucid's pretty great. And they think—and a lot of little boys do, too. And the point is that she is doing something that we could not have imagined just a few years ago. And these kids in this audience today—and all of you who brought your children, I want to thank you and all of you young people that came on your own, I want to thank you. But our commitment to the space program is one example of the fact that we are going to solve problems, climb mountains, and push back boundaries in ways that

we cannot even imagine. You young people will be doing work that hasn't been invented yet, often that hasn't been imagined yet.

Let me just give you just a couple of examples. Number one, we have more than doubled the life expectancy of people with the HIV infection in only 4 years with medical research. Number two—I'll give you another example. A lot of you were very moved by what Christopher Reeve said at our Democratic Convention about the importance of medical research. He's so brave, so powerful. Just a few days before he made that speech, it was revealed that for the first time ever in laboratory animals with severed spines had movement in their lower limbs because of nerve transplants to those spines. Who knows what we can do to give people their mobility back, to give people their future back? Who knows? We have to keep fighting for that. We have to keep fighting for that. Third example: The United States just issued into a joint venture with IBM to build a supercomputer that will do more calculations in one second then you can do on your hand-held calculator at home in 30,000 years. That is the future, and I'm determined to see that we keep investing in that future so every one of these kids will have a place in it.

And let me say this: We can have a tax cut. But it ought to be a tax cut that is targeted to folks who need it and targeted to the purposes that will help our country most, to raising children, to getting people a college education, to paying for health care and the first home, and to making sure people don't have to pay a tax on their home when they sell it, because often that's the only savings they've got in life. That's the kind of tax cut we can afford and we ought to have the one we can afford, but we shouldn't have one we can't afford. You don't want to go back and run up this deficit again.

One thing our friends in the other party said last year that I agree with—they were absolutely right, and I hate to see them change their position—last year they said, if we're not on a plan to a balanced budget it will add 2 percent to our interest rates. Now, I want you to go home and think about this tonight. What would it mean to you if you had 2 percent on your car payment, 2 percent on your credit card payment, 2 per-

cent on your home mortgage, 2 percent on your student loan? What would it mean to the economy of Houston and Texas if every business person had to pay 2 percent more to borrow money? It would mean fewer jobs, slower growth, fewer pay raises. It would take us right back where we were. We do not want to go back; we want to go forward, build a bridge to the 21st century. And I want to ask you to help me build a bridge to the 21st century that will give world-class education to all of our children. And I hope you will do that.

First thing I want to say is, we've got a lot of great educational opportunities in this country, but 40 percent of the 8-year-olds in America can't even read a book by themselves yet. And I want to mobilize an army of volunteers, through AmeriCorps, through senior citizens, through reading specialists, to go out and work with parents and teachers so that by the year 2000 every 8-year-old in America can pick up a book and say, "I can read this all by myself." And I want you to help me do that.

I want us to connect every classroom and library and every school in America to the information superhighway. You know why? A lot of you are older like me and aren't great with computers. Let me tell you in plain language what that means. If we put the computers, the software, the teachers out there who understand it, and then we hook it up to all these information networks, what that means is, for the first time in the history of America the kids in the poorest, inner-city schools, the kids in the remotest rural schools in west Texas and North Dakota and you name it will have access to the same information at the same level of quality in the same time as the children in the richest schools, public or private, in the United States do. It will revolutionize education. We can do that if you'll help. We can do that. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? *[Applause]*

Let me say this. Most of us are going to have to face the fact that education is a lifetime endeavor. More and more the average age of people going to college is higher and higher. More and more when people lose a job, they got to go back to school and get training if they want to get a better job in-

stead of a worse one. We have got to make the doors of college open to every single American who is willing to work hard to be a good student. That ought to be the only criterion.

And I want to do three things. Number one, I want more families to be able to save in an IRA, an individual retirement account, save for their retirement account, but take it out without any taxes if they're using the money to pay for education.

Number two, in 4 years I want at least 2 years of education after high school, a community college degree, to be as universal in America as a high school diploma is today. And it will be easy to do. This is not complicated. Nearly every American lives within driving distance of a good community college. And they work or they'd go out of business. They're great institutions.

What we propose to do is to let you take off your tax bill dollar-for-dollar the tuition cost at the typical community college for 2 years, so that every American of any age can go. And we can pay for it in the balanced budget.

And finally, in this great city with great higher education facilities and great medical facilities, I believe we ought to give the American taxpayers a deduction of up to \$10,000 a year for the tuition cost of any education after high school at any age. And I want you to help me deliver that.

There's a lot more we have to do, folks. We need to keep supporting people like your mayor here and finish the job of putting 100,000 police on the streets. We need to keep supporting community antidrug activities and antigang activities like the safe and drug-free schools programs that I fought so hard for and that we stopped this Congress from gutting when they tried to do it. We need to keep doing that.

We've got to keep working—and I have a plan to help the cities and the private sector create 1 million jobs to help the new welfare reform law succeed. Let me say this: That new law says something simple and straightforward and it's controversial, but I want you to know why I believe it's the right thing to do. It says the Federal Government will continue to guarantee to poor families medical care and nutrition, and if the person takes

a job, more money on child care than ever before. But we're going to give what used to be in that check to the States, and eventually to the local community workers, and they have to figure out how to turn that welfare check into a paycheck for every able-bodied person within 2 years. That means that everybody in Houston, Texas, that ever cursed the welfare system has now got an obligation to say, "What can I do to help these people go to work?" Because we want people to succeed at home and at work. That's what we want for poor families, what we want for working families. And I intend to help, and I want you to help. I want you to help.

We've got to keep working to help our families succeed at home and at work. Anywhere I go in America, the number one thing I hear from families is that every working family, whether they're modest income, middle income, even upper income working families, nearly every family I talk to with children can cite one or two traumatic examples in their lives when they've had a real conflict between their jobs and their job at home of raising their children. I say we want to build a bridge to the 21st century where Americans can succeed with their children—their most important work—and at their jobs. And that's what this whole policy is all about.

That's why I think—that's why, with all respect to the folks who are here, I think we were right and they were wrong when I signed the family and medical leave law. Now, what they said—what they said was, "If you pass this family and medical leave law, it will be terrible for business." All the law said is, if your business has 50 or more employees, an employee can have a little time off when there's a baby born or a sick parent or a sick child, without being fired. That's all it said.

Now, 3 years later, now we know. Twelve million families have taken some time off, and during that time we've got 10½ million more jobs and a record number of new small businesses every year. We can protect work and family in America and build this country together.

I believe we can improve our environment, not just protect it, and grow the economy. And I want to tell you that in spite of what I said before about toxic waste sites, there

are still 10 million American children living within 4 miles of a toxic waste dump—10 million of them. But if you'll give us 4 more years, we'll clean up the 500 worst dumps, and our kids will be growing up next to parks, not poison. Will you help us build that bridge to the 21st century? *[Applause]* Will you do that? *[Applause]*

Let me make one last comment. A big part of building our bridge is how we relate to the rest of the world and how we relate to each other. I'm proud of the fact that this country is a safer country than it was. The nuclear threat has been diminished. We have been a force for peace. We have strengthened our efforts against terrorism. We have dramatically expanded trade. But we have to face the fact that we are going to live in a global society where no matter where you live, we can transfer ideas, information, money, technology, across the borders of nations in a split second.

Now, if you think about that kind of world, there is no nation as well-positioned as the United States to do well. Why? Well, look around this crowd today—because we all come from somewhere else. Everybody but the Native Americans all come from somewhere else—everybody. When I welcomed the Olympic teams to Atlanta there were teams from 197 different national groups. The largest county in America, Los Angeles County, has people from 150 of those places in one of our counties. When I looked at the American Olympic team it occurred to me that if they took their uniforms off we wouldn't know where they're from. *[Laughter]* They could be from China; they could be from Japan; they could be from India; they could be from Pakistan; they could be from the Middle East; they could be from the Nordic countries; they could be from Europe; they could be from Latin America; they could be from anywhere. That's America.

This is not a country based on race, ethnicity, or specific religious convictions. This is a country which has said for over 200 years, if you believe in the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution of this country, you're our kind of person. All you've got to do is show up tomorrow and behave and we'll build a bridge you

can walk across into the 21st century. Now, you have to ask yourself, do you believe that?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Will you help us build that kind of bridge?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Do you believe our best days are still ahead?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Then for 39 days go out and tell it to other people, and we'll have a great victory in Texas and in America.

Thank you, and God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:42 p.m. at Sam Houston Park. In his remarks, he referred to Victoria Baldwin, principal, Fulmore Elementary School in Austin, TX. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

September 28, 1996

Good morning. Today I want to talk to you about a new executive action I'm taking to crack down on deadbeat parents who won't pay the child support they owe.

During my time as President, I've had a straightforward strategy: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and coming together in a stronger American community. That's America's basic bargain.

We've worked hard to offer every American opportunity, the chance to make the most of his or her own life. We've got 10½ million new jobs, the lowest unemployment in 7½ years, the deficit has been cut by 60 percent. And just this week, we received more news that our strategy is working and America is on the right track. According to the U.S. census, the income of a typical family went up \$1,600 over inflation over the past 2 years. In just the last year the increase was almost \$900, the biggest increase in a decade. The number of people living in poverty and the rate of income inequality in our country dropped faster than at any time since 1968. Our economy clearly is on the right track to the 21st century.

As we offer opportunity, we must also demand responsibility. The problems of our society will only be solved if there is an upsurge of personal responsibility, if individuals take